

# Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

The **Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians** (EBCI), (Cherokee: CWYᎠᎩ ᏍᏚᎠᎩᎯᎵᎦ, *TsalagiᎩ DetsadanilvᎩ*) is a federally recognized Indian Tribe in the United States, who are descended from the small group of 800 Cherokee who remained in the Eastern United States after the Indian Removal Act moved the other 15,000 Cherokee to the west in the 19th century. They were required to assimilate and renounce tribal Cherokee citizenship.<sup>[1]</sup>

The history of the Eastern Band closely follows that of the Qualla Boundary, a land trust made up of an area of their original territory. When they reorganized as a tribe, they had to buy back the land from the US government. The EBCI also own, hold, or maintain additional lands in the vicinity, and as far away as 100 miles (160 km) from the Qualla Boundary. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians are primarily the descendants of those persons listed on the Baker Rolls of Cherokee Indians. They gained federal recognition as a tribe in the 20th century. The Qualla Boundary is not a reservation per se because the land is owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is one of three federally recognized Cherokee tribes, the others being the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, both based in Oklahoma. Its headquarters is in the namesake town of Cherokee, North Carolina in the Qualla Boundary, south of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

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## Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) CWYᎠᎩ ᏍᏚᎠᎩᎯᎵᎦ



Flag of the Eastern Band Cherokee

### Total population

16,000+

### Regions with significant populations

United States (North Carolina)

### Languages

English, Cherokee

### Religion

Christianity (mostly Protestant),  
traditional tribal religion

### Related ethnic groups

Cherokee Nation, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians Catawba Nation Caucasian  
African American

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## History, language and religion

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The Eastern Band members are primarily descended from about 800 Cherokee living along the remote Oconaluftee River who did not participate in the Trail of Tears to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Principal Chief Yonaguska, with the help of his adopted European-American son, William Holland Thomas, managed to avoid removal. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have maintained many traditional tribal practices. Many prominent Cherokee historians are affiliated with, or are members of the Eastern Band.

Tsali (pronounced ['tsali]) opposed the removal. He remained in the traditional Cherokee lands with a small group who resisted the U.S. Army and tried to thwart the removal. Tsali was eventually captured. He was executed by the United States in exchange for the lives of the small band he protected. They were allowed to remain in the Cherokee homeland, with the condition that they give up Cherokee tribal citizenship and assimilate as US citizens.

Their descendants reorganized in the 20th century and gained federal recognition as a tribe known as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (named in reference to the majority of the tribe who moved west to Indian Territory in 1839.) They bought back land in what is known as Qualla Boundary, part of their traditional territory that had been ceded to the US government by other Cherokee leaders prior to removal.



Joel Queen, award-winning Eastern Band sculptor and ceramic artist

Their Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina exhibits an extensive collection of artifacts and items of historical and cultural interest, from the early Mississippian Period, of which there are remains in the area, to the Cherokee Culture brought by their migrants in the 16th and 17th centuries. They are an Iroquoian-speaking people related to those nations in the Iroquois Confederacy and other Iroquoian-speaking groups traditionally occupying territory around the Great Lakes. The Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, located near the museum, sells traditional crafts made by its members. Founded in 1946, the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual is country's oldest and foremost Native American crafts cooperative.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Contemporary language and religion

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More than two dozen Christian churches of various denominations are located within the Qualla Boundary. Many of the traditional religious practices of the Eastern Band have, over time, blended with new age views and customs according to Cherokee traditionalists. They have diverged as the result of cultural isolation of the various factions of Cherokee society. Many traditional dances and ceremonies are still practiced by the Eastern Band.



A stickball dance on the Qualla Boundary. 1897.

The Eastern Band has begun a language immersion program requiring all graduating high school seniors to speak the tribal language beginning 2007. Of the total population in the Qualla Boundary, there are approximately 900 speakers, 72% of whom are over the age of 50.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Eastern Cherokee Indian Land Trust (Qualla Boundary)

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Blowgun demonstration in Oconaluftee Indian Village, Cherokee, North Carolina

The Eastern Cherokee Indian Nation Land, officially known as the Qualla Boundary, is located at

35°28'43"N 83°16'20"W ([https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Eastern\\_Band\\_of\\_Cherokee\\_Indians&params=35\\_28\\_43\\_N\\_83\\_16\\_20\\_W\\_scale:250000](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Eastern_Band_of_Cherokee_Indians&params=35_28_43_N_83_16_20_W_scale:250000)) in western North Carolina, just south of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The main part of the reserve lies in eastern Swain County and northern Jackson County, but smaller non-contiguous sections are located to the southwest in Cherokee County (Cheoah community) and Graham County

(the Snowbird community). A small part of the main reservation extends eastward into Haywood County. The total land area of these parts is 213.934 km<sup>2</sup> (82.600 sq mi), with a 2000 census resident population of 8,092 persons.<sup>[4]</sup>

The Qualla Boundary is not strictly a reservation, but rather a "land trust" supervised by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs. The land is a mere fragment of the extensive original homeland of the Cherokee Nation, which once stretched from Virginia to South Carolina and west to present-day Tennessee and Alabama. The people had to purchase their land to regain it after it was taken over by the US government through treaty cessions, which had all been negotiated by a very small percentage of assimilated Cherokees.

Today the tribe earns most of its revenue from a combination of Federal/State funds, tourism, and the Harrah's Cherokee Casino, established in the early 1990s.

Tourism includes many campgrounds, trails and river adventures, mountain biking, fishing, golfing, spas, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Unto These Hills Outdoor Historical Drama, Oconaluftee Indian Village, Cherokee Botanical Garden and Nature Trail, the award-winning Museum of the Cherokee Indian, zoos, restaurants and a collection of galleries and shops representing gifted, traditional artists, such as Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual.

## **Gaming relations with North Carolina**

In 1988, the United States Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), which allowed federally recognized tribes to establish casinos on tribal property. Under the act, tribes are limited to offer casino games that correspond to the existing level of gaming allowed under state law. North Carolina was unique in permitting the Cherokee to establish a casino offering Class III gaming in 1994, well before the state allowed a lottery. The typical pattern has been for states to offer a lottery, followed by an agreement between the state and the Indian tribe to allow establishment of a casino or other form of gambling operation.<sup>[5]</sup>

The first major casino in North Carolina, Harrah's Cherokee Casino (in partnership with Caesars Entertainment Corporation), was opened on Qualla Boundary, land of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in the western part of the state on November 13, 1997.<sup>[6]</sup> The casino was the result of nearly ten years of negotiations among tribal, state, and federal officials. Tribal Chief Jonathan "Ed" Taylor, North Carolina Lead Liaison and Chief Negotiator David T. McCoy, and Governor Jim Hunt developed a plan for a casino that would meet state laws and satisfy local and tribal concerns.<sup>[5]</sup>

Tribal leaders wanted to be able to offer more than bingo and other Class I forms of gambling, to attract larger crowds and generate greater revenue. The tribe had previously opened a small casino offering forms of video poker and electronic bingo. This had been challenged by the Asheville, North Carolina U.S Attorney on the grounds that the tribe was offering a form of gambling that was not legal elsewhere in North Carolina. The tribe wanted to ensure agreements with the state to prevent such problems.<sup>[5]</sup>

Since the inception of the North Carolina lottery in August 2005, Harrah's Cherokee casino has been permitted to extend its offered games to include Class II and III gambling. As thousands of people visit Harrah's each year and the casino's popularity continues to increase, the economic benefits of the casino have become evident. Annually, at least \$5 million of casino profits is given to the Cherokee Preservation Fund; this institution pays for projects that promote non-gambling economic development, protect the environment, and preserve Cherokee heritage and culture.<sup>[7]</sup> Another portion of casino profits goes to improving tribal health-care, education, housing, etc. Part of the revenue goes to the state of North Carolina, as provided by the agreement drafted by Taylor and Hunt.<sup>[5]</sup>

In 1996, the first amendment to the compact was entered into the Federal Register, establishing the appointments of the Gaming Commission, staggered five-year terms for commissioners, and the ability to hire independent legal council upon Tribe approval.<sup>[8]</sup> In 2001, the second amendment to the compact was entered, it raised gambling age from 18 to 21, make-up and appointments to the Gambling Commission between the Tribe and the North Carolina Governor, creation of the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, and clarification on games, prizes and gifts awarded.<sup>[9]</sup> In 2002, an agreement of authorization was reached that allowed the Tribe to hold electronic Bingo and Raffle games.<sup>[10]</sup>

In 2011, Governor Bev Perdue and Principal Chief Michell Hicks came to an agreement on a new 30-year gaming compact. The agreement allowed live table games and grants the Tribe sole rights to provide those games west of Interstate 26. Granting the exclusivity, the Tribe had agreed to a revenue sharing agreement with the State, which will only be used for public education purposes.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

On September 28, 2015, the Tribe opened their second casino, Harrah's Cherokee Valley River, in Murphy, North Carolina.<sup>[13]</sup> On July 26, 2019, Governor Roy Cooper signed Senate Bill 154 into law that permitted wagering on sports and horse racing on tribal lands.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Notable members

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- Goingback Chiltoskey (1907–2000), woodcarver and educator
- Amanda Crowe (1928–2004), sculptor and educator
- Joyce Dugan, Principal Chief
- Charles George (1932–1952), Medal of Honor recipient<sup>[15]</sup>
- Shan Goshorn (1957–2018), visual artist
- Myrtle Driver Johnson, (1944–) Beloved Woman and translator
- Nimrod Jarrett Smith (1837–1893), Principal Chief
- Lottie Queen Stamper (1907–1987), basket maker and educator
- Amanda Swimmer (1921–2018), potter, given the title of Beloved Woman<sup>[16]</sup>
- William Holland Thomas, (1805–1893), Principal Chief



Video of Jerry Wolfe speaking in English and Cherokee



- Jeremiah "Jerry" Wolfe (1924–2018) Cherokee stone carver, stickball caller, storyteller, veteran, and Beloved Man

## See also

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- Stickball (Native American)
- Cherokee Preservation Foundation
- Harrah's Cherokee
- New Kituwah Academy

## Notes

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